

APR 27 1971

# Quartet of Black Comedies in Berkeley

By Jeanne Miller

Last weekend, Berkeley's Magic Theater opened "Four-in-One," a premiere production of lively, irreverent black comedies that attempt to comment on the alienation of the individual in a technological society. They are only sporadically successful.

Two of the one-acts were written by San Francisco playwright Nick Kazan. His "Beau" opens the program at the Steppenwolf on San Pablo Avenue.

Originally titled "The American Businessman's Dream," "Beau" deals with an affair between a sexy young woman (Peggy Browne) and a stodgy businessman (Terry Wills). The series of vignettes veers from reality to fantasy with some splendidly comic moments, like Miss Browne's hilarious description of a White House diplomatic party hosted by the Kennedys.

But Kazan practices overkill on his play, repeating the funniest sequences and even phrases so often that their edge is blunted.

Kazan's "Stroganoff" is a bleak portrait of the disintegration of a marriage that should never have been consummated in the first place.

The husband, Steven Kent Browne, is a tormented, insecure, almost psychotic chap who is married to a conventional, unimaginative woman (Gloria Miller). She has no insight and he has no suspicion of her needs.

Kazan symbolizes their mutually destructive relationship by a quarrel which occurs when she prepares his favorite dish, beef stroganoff.

The play misfires because Kazan tries too hard to be outrageous. The husband becomes selfish, sadistic and sophomoric so that we perceive very little of his tor-

---

"FOUR-IN-ONE," four short plays by Nick Kazan, James Schéville and Michael McClure. Directed by John Lion and Peter Hirschfeld. Settings and costumes by Jerry McColgan. With Terry Wills, Peggy Browne, Steven Kent Browne, Gloria Miller, Linda McColgan, Christopher Brooks, Charles Goldman. At the Magic Theater in the Steppenwolf, 2136 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley.

---

tured conflicts that should constitute the play's strength.

Kazan has so much genuine comedic talent it's regrettable he should find it necessary to resort to scatology and nudity to drive home his points.

James Schéville's "Oppenheimer's Chair" is also guilty of driving a good joke into the ground. The satire is set in the Atomic Museum in Los Alamos where two bird-brained housewives (Gloria Miller and Linda McColgan) indulge in a modern form of idolatry.

They're bemused and excited when they see the chair where physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer devised the bomb. Sexually aroused by proximity to an object belonging to their hero, they proceed to make slavish love to the chair in a sequence which is developed too extensively and too broadly by the playwright.

Michael McClure's "The Growl," a space-age fantasy about the paranoid visions of a CIA agent, completes the program. ✓

Christopher Brooks plays the agent, an emotionally disturbed man whose endless work on detailed financial reports is only to cover for his investigation of the "inside-outers," a mysterious group of citizens wreaking havoc with the country by turning their bodies inside out.

The play is disturbing and sometimes very funny, but it too is repetitious at the outset.

All four plays were staged (by John Lion and Robert Hirschfeld) with vigor and spirit and excellently performed by the talented, energetic troupe.

"Four-in-One" will run for seven weeks, Thursdays through Sundays at 8 p.m. at the Steppenwolf, 2136 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley.